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Sudanese Caper Of Ex-CIA Agent Quite Revealing

In the checkered career of renegade CIA agent Edwin P. Wilson, no escapade is more revealing than his involvement in a scheme to engineer a coup in Sudan, doublecrossing his Libyan protectors in the process.

Wilson eventually was betrayed by an associate, tricked into leaving his Libyan sanctuary and brought to trial on charges of running guns to Col. Muammar Qaddafi. Last week he was sentenced to 15 years in prison.

But the Sudanese caper began while Wilson was still riding high in Libya under Qaddafi's wing.

Here's the story, according to sources close to Wilson, who provided documentary evidence:

Wilson met his initial Sudanese contact, Capt. Elnour Zarroug, on a plane from London to Tripoli in 1979. Zarroug worked for Gulf Fisheries, a company owned by the sheik of Kuwait.

He was also an adviser to the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, and was active in the maritime industry in Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the Philippines.

Not long after their chance meeting on the plane, Zarroug invited Wilson to work in Sudan. Wilson, still secure in his relationship with Qaddafi, declined the invitation and told Libyan intelligence about it.

But by June, 1981, as a result of columns I was writing on Wilson and Qaddafi, things were getting hot for the ex-CIA agent in Libya. So Wilson reopened the Sudanese connection by sending an associate, John Heath, to London for a meeting with Omar Mohammed el Tayeb, then Sudan's minister of national security, the Sudanese equivalent of the CIA. He is now the second most powerful man in the country. Tayeb also happens to be a blood enemy of Qaddafi, so Wilson's negotiations were delicate.

Tayeb promised that Heath and Wilson would get VIP treatment if they would come to Sudan, ostensibly to help set up espionage apparatus for the Sudanese government. Actually, Tayeb apparently had something more ambitious in mind—a coup against President Gaafar Mohammed Nimeiri.

Ever cautious, Wilson checked with Libyan intelligence sources, who encouraged him to go to Sudan and report back to them. Wilson sent Heath and another aide to Sudan on Aug. 8, 1981. They were met by Tayeb's deputy, Gasim Ahmed Gasim, bypassed customs and were whisked from the airport in an unmarked black limousine.

According to Wilson's typewritten report on the matter, shown to my associate Dale Van Atta, Tayeb wanted a shipping company set up as a front for Sudan's espionage operations abroad, something Wilson had done for the CIA and U.S. Navy intelligence in the old days.

Tayeb also wanted video and other surveillance equipment from Wilson for "security of the bridges over the Nile, the president's residence, their sugar factories and borders." The borders Tayeb was most concerned about were those with Libya and Chad.

"It is obvious," Wilson wrote, "that the Sudanese are most concerned with counterrevolutionary groups located in Libya, training in Libya and Chad, which provide an external threat to Sudan."

Sources close to Wilson said he had received information that Tayeb's primary interest was overthrowing Nimeiri once Wilson had been hired to provide security for the Sudanese president. In other words, Wilson would be double-crossing both Nimeiri and Qaddafi by helping Tayeb seize power in Sudan.

The negotiations were still continuing when Tayeb, in October, 1981, was promoted to third vice president by Nimeiri. (He has since been promoted to first vice president.) This apparently satisfied Tayeb, and he no longer needed the services of the treacherous American.